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Socialism: Science or Cyanide?

When totalitarianism is disguised as rationality.

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HISTORY BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION CENTRAL PLANNING COMMUNISM HOLODOMOR MARXISM-LENINISM TOTALITARIANISM USSR

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Editor's note: Marianna Davidovich, head of external relations at FEE, recently published a booklet titled ***The Buried Stories of Communism & Socialism****, available on Amazon. The following essay by FEE's president emeritus, Lawrence W. Reed, appears in it as the Afterword.*

In this volume, Marianna Davidovich vividly recounts the world's horrific experiences with the evil of communism. It's a ghastly record, littered with the bodies of a hundred million victims and the lost liberties of hundreds of millions more. No one should have ever expected otherwise; even the founder of modern communist ideology, Karl Marx, advocated extreme violence as a necessary ingredient in the communist formula.

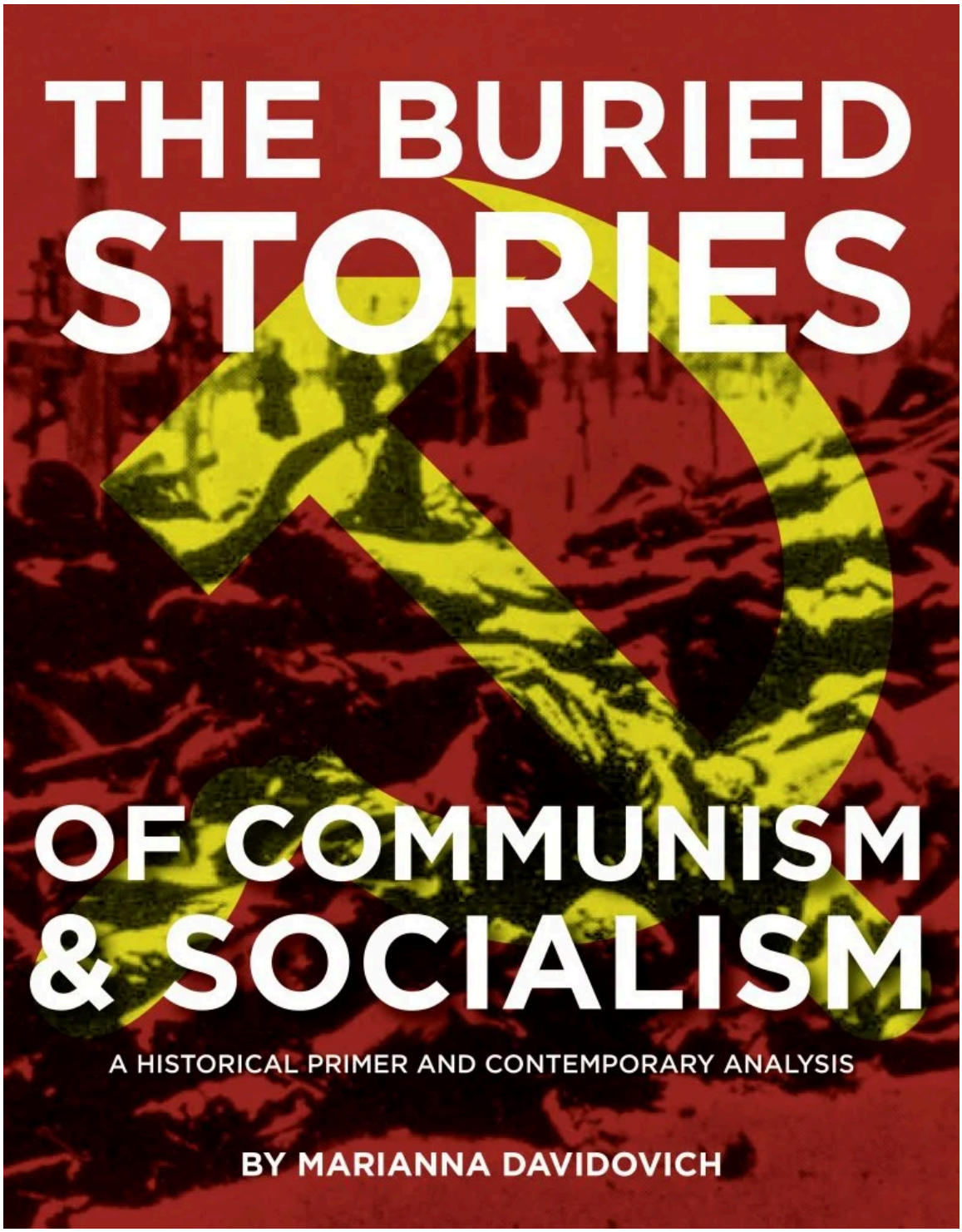
What the world refers to as "communist" countries—such as the Soviet Union of Lenin and Stalin, Pol Pot's Cambodia, Mao's China, Castro's Cuba, and others Marianna discusses—would not be labeled as such by Karl Marx himself. He postulated that communism would be the end game of all history and would be characterized by government "withering away" after a period of socialism and its brutal "dictatorship of the proletariat."

So, what we widely refer to as communist countries are, according to both Marx and the governments of those very countries themselves, *socialist*. None of them called themselves communist; all of them proudly adopted the socialist label. The full name of the old Soviet Union, for example, was the Union of Soviet *Socialist* Republics.

Marx's prediction that socialist dictatorships would eventually dissolve into government-less, communist utopias was embraced by pseudo-intellectuals as some sort of messianic prophecy. But how could Marx know the future of his own country, let alone that of others? Was he a palm reader? Did he use tarot cards, a crystal ball, or a Ouija board? Or did God (in whom he didn't believe) generously gift him with visionary powers that no one else has?

Of course, none of those things apply here. Marx was no fortune-teller. He was a charlatan, an angry and nasty scribbler with vile, racist, and anti-Semitic tendencies. He mooched off others all his life. As British historian Paul Johnson explained in his book, *Intellectuals*, Marx was cruel to his own family. He yearned for the violence his predicted socialist dictatorships would produce. Hardly anyone showed up for his funeral.

Marx's notion that under communism, government would "wither away" was always a nonsensical non-starter. He never explained how or why that would occur. What would



Cover image for *The Buried Stories of Communism & Socialism*

Now that Marianna has provided the awful details of death and destruction in the countries influenced by Marx's teaching, the big remaining question is WHY? *Why does socialism so naturally produce mayhem on an industrial scale?*

interference with prices and the market forces of supply and demand. They have lower taxes on business and more school choice than the United States. They boast trade-based, globalized economies, and few if any nationalized industries.

The prime minister of Denmark recently declared, "I know that some people in the U.S. associate the Nordic model with some sort of socialism. Therefore, I would like to make one thing clear. Denmark is far from a socialist planned economy. Denmark is a market economy." The Index of Economic Freedom ranks Denmark, Norway, and Sweden as among the freest (most capitalist) in the world.

It's true that after World War II, Scandinavian countries stumbled into generous welfare states, but being no more than a welfare state is not by itself dictionary socialism. More to the point, those nations eventually turned away from even that—cutting taxes and spending and reviving private sector entrepreneurship. Margaret Thatcher forced the same changes in Britain when, by the late 1970s, her country's welfare state turned Britain into "the sick man of Europe."

When countries adopt a blend of socialism and capitalism—a formula once termed "the middle way"—socialists claim credit for progress real or imagined. But repeatedly, such situations reveal that most if not all the "progress" such places achieve is not because of the socialism they've adopted, but because of the capitalism they haven't yet destroyed. Capitalism produces wealth (even Marx admitted to that), whereas socialism and socialists simply confiscate and redistribute it.

Back to the central question: *Why does socialism so naturally produce mayhem on an industrial scale?*

One very big reason is its accumulation and centralization of power, the most toxic motivation in human history. The desire to dominate and control, to plan other people's lives, to push others around and take their stuff, to monopolize one corner of society after another—all these elements of a "power trip" are part and parcel of the socialist vision.

But socialism promises to help the poor and the needy, you say! Well, of course, it promises such things. How far would it get if its advocates told the truth? Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Castro, Pol Pot, etc. all proclaimed "solidarity with the people," especially the poor. They never honestly declared, "Give us power, and we will crush dissent and throw you to the dogs for opposing our plans!"

Socialism is rightly and widely perceived as diametrically opposed to capitalism. So, it can't possibly be defined as acts of caring, sharing, giving, and being compassionate

Even when it comes to most foreign aid, capitalist countries are the donors and socialist countries are the recipients. You can't give it away or share it with anybody if you don't create it in the first place, and socialism offers utterly no theory of wealth creation, only wealth confiscation and consumption.

Note that socialists do not propose to accomplish their objectives by mutual consent. They do not advocate raising the money for their plans by way of bake sales or charitable solicitations. Your participation is not voluntary. From start to finish, socialism's defining characteristic is not so much the promises meant to beguile but rather, the method by which it implements its agenda—*FORCE*. If it's voluntary, it's not socialism. It's that simple.

In theory, practice, and outcome, socialism is profoundly *anti-social*. Here's why:

1. **The plans of socialists are more important than yours.** Why? Because they say so. Isn't that reason enough? "The more the State plans," wrote Austrian economist F. A. Hayek, "the more difficult planning becomes for the individual." But socialists don't care about that because what they have in mind is surely more noble than anything us peasants are thinking. Socialism is profoundly anti-individual because it seeks to homogenize people in a giant, collectivist blender.

2. **Socialists are know-it-alls and know-nothings, simultaneously.** This is a remarkable achievement, perhaps socialism's singular contribution to sociology. Even if a socialist's own life is a mess, he still knows how to run everybody else's. Even if he doesn't believe there's a God, he thinks the State can be one. F. A. Hayek nailed it when he wrote, "The curious task of economics is to convince men of how little they know about what they imagine they can design."

3. **Socialism rejects biological science.** No climate-change denier denies that climate exists. But socialists claim that if there's such a thing as human nature, they can abolish and reinvent it. Humans are individuals, with no two alike in every way, but socialists believe they can homogenize and collectivize us into an obedient blob. It doesn't bother them to punish individual success and achievement even if the result is equal impoverishment. They believe that human beings will work harder and smarter for the State than they will for themselves or their families. This is much closer to witchcraft than science.

4. **Socialists call the cops for everything.** Have you ever noticed that the socialist agenda is not a page of helpful suggestions, or a list of tips for better living? When they're in charge, you don't get to say, "No, thanks." Freedom of choice? No, sir! Socialist ideas are so good, the old saying goes, that they must be mandatory and

count on it.

5. **Socialism is more than anti-capitalism. It's *anti-capital*.** In his remarkable book, *Intellectuals*, British historian Paul Johnson penned a blistering chapter about Karl Marx. Johnson quotes Marx's own mother as famously remarking that she wished her son Karl "would accumulate some capital instead of just writing about it." Mrs. Marx was on to something. Karl and his acolytes, to one degree or another, make war on the single most powerful generator of the material wealth that improves the lives of people—namely, private property and its accumulation by private, profit-seeking individuals who invest and create and employ. Wherever such lunacy gains power, it marches its subjects backward towards the Stone Age.

6. **Conflict is their God.** From Marx to socialists of the present day, conflict is everything. If it's not present, they will invent it. After all, everyone is either a victim or a villain, an oppressor or part of the oppressed. Conflict is the way history unfolds, so they tell us. And like palm readers and tarot card practitioners, they declare the future to be on their side. This always-angry perspective rules out a spirit of gratitude, especially toward capitalists. Socialists never show up at a business of any size with signs exclaiming "Thank you for taking risks, providing products and employing people."

One of the greatest economists ever, Ludwig von Mises, wrote this eloquent summation:

> A man who chooses between drinking a glass of milk and a glass of a solution of potassium cyanide does not choose between two beverages; he chooses between life and death. A society that chooses between capitalism and socialism does not choose between two social systems; it chooses between social cooperation and the disintegration of society. Socialism is not an alternative to capitalism; it is an alternative to any system under which men can live as human beings.

Communism as envisioned by its intellectual father Karl Marx is an unachievable and undesirable fantasy. In the real world, efforts to realize Marx's delusions are simply full-blown, unadulterated socialism. And that's the cyanide that both Mises and Marianna are warning us about.

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